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Flyboys of the CIA

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SOMETIME TODAY, weather permitting, a U.S. B-26 bomber will take off from an airstrip in the Portuguese African colony of Angola. Its mission is to destroy concentrations of black guerrillas in the Angolan bush. It is not always easy for the pilot to distinguish a guerrilla fighter from other black persons, but then this is a common problem in this type of war, and even in cases of mistaken identity the bombing seems to have a useful deterrent effect. Before nightfall, the U.S.-trained pilot will fly back to the airstrip, leaving his twin-

engine machine in the care of a star-wounded mechanic.

There's a war on in Angola. Since March 1961, when contract laborers earning 30 cents a day revolted against Portuguese plantation owners, touching off a planned anti-colonial rebellion, there's been a war on. In reprisal the Portuguese launched a reign of terror. Africans were executed *en masse*. Entire villages were moved into areas under white control; otherwise they were bombed. The larger towns became armed encampments. Portuguese troops patrolled the streets with submachine guns, shooting Africans with or without provocation. More than 100,000 refugees, most of them diseased, starving or wounded after months of running and hiding in the forest crossed the border into the Congo.

When Moise Tshombe took power in the Congo, the Angolan rebel movement went into temporary eclipse. The pro-European Tshombe was reluctant to permit sanctuary for attacks on his covert allies, the Portuguese. Despite him, guerrilla patrols continued to make forays into their Portuguese occupied homeland. And today with the Congolese government of Joseph Mobutu allowing them greater freedom of movement, the Angolan revolutionaries expect to get their second wind.

Since the Angolan uprising, Africans have launched liberation movements in other Portuguese colonies: Mozambique, Cabinda and Portuguese Guinea (where nationalists control half the territory, operating their own schools and civil administration). All of them make the same absolute demand: Independence and Now. But the lessons of Kenya and Algeria have been lost on the Portuguese. Maintaining more than 80,000 troops in Africa—50,000 in Mozambique alone—in addition to civil militia and police, they are determined to remain. Their military alliance with the United States and the other NATO powers can only bolster their determination. Certainly, NATO military aid has been a major factor in Portugal's success in containing the insurgents of Angola. The large quantity of NATO weapons captured by the rebels, the napalm bomb casings marked "Property of the United States Army" found in the devastated mud-and-stick villages (and shown to western correspondents at the border) attest to that. And many of the Portuguese officers leading the reprisals are graduates of counter-guerrilla warfare schools operated by the U.S. Special Forces.

Which brings us back to the B-26 bombers, and how they got to Angola with their American-trained pilots and mechanics. It is a long story, about America's legendary anti-colonialism, and about a bizarre smuggling trial held, of all places, in Buffalo, New York. It is also about that old canard that if there's a plot afoot, the Central Intelligence Agency has got to be mixed up in it. Well, this time, like last time, it appears it was.

by David Welsh